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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 3750
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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0888
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: US/EU Decisions to Halt Aid to
PA, Lebanon, Iraq (4/7-11)

11. Summary: Syrian papers reported a Syrian Information Ministry statement denying a report by an Israeli newspaper that Syria had sent messages to Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert seeking to resume peace talks between the two countries. The source told Syria's official SANA news agency that "this information is baseless" and stressed "Syria's permanent commitment to achieve comprehensive and just peace based on pertinent UN Security Council resolutions that demand full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the 1967 war borderline." The official criticized the "Israeli leaks" as aiming at covering Israel's "apartheid oppressive practices in the Palestinian lands...."

Papers also reported a statement by the Syrian Foreign Ministry denying that Syria had sent the United Nations a map of the Shebaa Farms and the Golan Heights. Damascus was responding to official reports and to a recent map issued by the UN Security Council published by a Lebanese daily that show the disputed farms as part of Syrian territory. This comes as Beirut is trying to establish the Lebanese identity of the farms. The Lebanese government has repeatedly asked Syria to provide the UN written evidence to document Lebanon's sovereignty over the farms.

On Lebanon, Syrian papers reported that the Lebanese government is holding nine Arab nationals amid reports of an assassination plot against Hizbollah SecGen Hasan Nasrallah. A Lebanese judicial official downplayed the charges being considered against the nine detainees, but a Hizbollah spokesman insisted that the Shiite militant group's leader was the target of a conspiracy by Lebanese and Palestinian nationals.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"The 14th Conference of member countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference will be inaugurated tomorrow in Istanbul with the participation of Dr. Mahmoud al-Abrash, Speaker of the People's Assembly. Al-Abrash discusses with Jasem al-Kharafi, his Kuwaiti counterpart, the latest developments in the region"

(Government-owned Tishreen, 4/11)

"Arab Foreign Ministers of Iraq's neighbors to meet in Cairo Tomorrow" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/11)

"Hizbollah confirms news of arrest of a terrorist network that planned to assassinate Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, SecGen of Hizbollah" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/11)

"Foreign Ministry denies sending maps of the occupied Golan and Shebaa Farms to the UN" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/10)

"Official media source: No messages to the Israeli Prime Minister designate on resuming peace negotiations. Syria persists in its demands to achieve just peace" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/10)

"Lebanese circles call for resignation of the Lebanese government and for early elections" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/10)

"Coalition consults with parliamentary blocs to have the final word regarding Al-Ja'fari's nomination" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/10)

"Israel threatens to boycott everyone who holds contacts with Hamas. Israeli aggression becomes more ferocious as economic siege worsens" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/10)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"It Is not in Europe's Interest"

Muhammad Khair al-Jamali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (4/10): "The unfair European decision to cut aid to the Palestinian Authority will exacerbate the already tense situation in the region and turn it into something like a powder keg ready to explode at any moment....
"The decision gives Israel the green light to implement its unilateral plan, which prevents the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state.... The Israeli military aggression against the Palestinians, which resulted in the death of 14 Palestinians in the past two days, was the first result of the Western siege against the Palestinian people....

"The European decision does not serve Europe's interest and its image in the region...."

"Exposed Collaboration"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (4/10): "The cessation of European and American aid to the Palestinians, which coincided with the Israeli aggression against Palestinians in Gaza, exposes an obvious collaboration with Israel to torpedo Palestinian rights and to abort what has been achieved on the Roadmap....

"The European-American punishment of the Palestinians shows the falsehood of the international quartet, which claimed that it drew up a peace plan but left Israel to do anything it wanted....

"Israel does not want peace with Palestinians.... Its protectors in the 'free world' gave it a free hand to destroy the peace process, and now they are helping it cause this human disaster to the Palestinians....

"Is it not shameful that Arabs stand impotent, unable to engage in any effective move to support their brothers? And why hasn't the Arab financial aid that the Khartoum summit agreed upon to support the steadfastness of the Palestinians arrived yet?"

"US Provocation"

An unsigned editorial in government-owned Al-Ba'th on (4/9):
"Washington's insistence on preventing the Palestinian government from implementing the political program on the basis of which it won the confidence of the Palestinian people in a rarely matched democratic process is a provocative action....

"The provocative US decision to halt financial aid to the Palestinian Authority did not mention the suffering of more than 3.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as a result of the Israeli occupation. It also ignored the state terrorism, the separation wall, the checkpoints, the closure of crossings, and the thousands of prisoners and detainees in the occupation jails....

"The US demands of the Palestinian government reflect the agenda of the Israeli right and perhaps go further than what Ehud Olmert himself is asking the Palestinians to do....

"Americans and Europeans are interfering in Palestinian options and pursuing a policy to starve out Palestinians.... The US and the EU should have punished Israel for the continuation of its occupation of the Arab territories and its daily crimes and extremist actions against the Palestinian people. Had there been such firmness and resolve against the Israelis, the world would have avoided, long ago, the tensions and wars that Israel is causing."

"A Booby-Trapped Israeli Demand"

Ali Nasrallah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (4/9): "Israel has stated that withdrawal from the Shebaa Farms can only come about through negotiations with Lebanon, ending with a peace agreement between the two sides....

"The Israeli position reaffirms that the demand of demarcating the border of Shebaa Farms was, and still is, a booby-trapped Israeli demand aimed at ending the Lebanese resistance, dismantling the links between Lebanon and Syria, and singling Lebanon out, isolating it from its Arab environment, moving it to the other side, and taking it completely out of the equation of the Arab-Israeli conflict...."

"Who Is Responsible for Chaos?"

Ahmad Hamadah, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/7): "The US invasion of Iraq resulted in the killing and wounding of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, the destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure, the collapse of the Iraqi establishments, and the spread of unprecedented chaos and political vacuum in Iraq....

"After all this, Condoleezza Rice and Jack Straw rush to visit Baghdad and use all their pressure cards to drive the Iraqi forces to fill the political vacuum and form the government, as if the Iraqis were the ones who created the vacuum and caused the chaos and destruction.

"Rice claims that the US Administration does not interfere in the election of a head of government in Iraq or in other domestic Iraqi affairs.... Washington applied pressure on all Iraqi forces to accept the American dictates.

"Jack Straw, for his part, agreed with Rice that sovereign Iraqi decisions are made only by Iraqis, but he later said that

Britain and the United States have the right to arrange the situation in Iraq and to have a say in what happens there....

"What happened this week -- the interference in Iraq's domestic affairs and the claim that there is no such interference -- brings to mind a host of American-British allegations through which the two countries have tried to mislead the world. But those allegations, primarily the claim that the two countries were willing to hold free, fair, and democratic elections to elect a government that represents the Iraqi people, were soon exposed. How can any election held under the swords of occupation be fair, free, democratic, and transparent?"

"All American and British statements suggested that the Iraqi government would be fully authorized to make sovereign decisions. But practices on the ground showed that the occupation ignored the Iraqis' right to full sovereignty over their land and capabilities. Is it possible, after all this, to fill the political vacuum in Iraq in a way that serves the interests of its people as long as the occupation remains?"

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